

0136xx - Special Area Management Plans (SAMPS)

Contributed by Regulatory Division
Monday, 09 January 2006

Special Area Management Plans (SAMPS)

{htmlfix} <iframe id="tickermain" src="http://www.spl.usace.army.mil/cms/files/projects/samp/sampmap.htm" width=410 height=330 marginwidth=30 marginheight=0 hspace=0 vspace=0 frameborder=0 scrolling=no></iframe>{/htmlfix}

Executive Summary

Under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA), the Corps of Engineers regulates the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States. The project review and permitting associated with these regulatory functions most often occurs on a project-by-project basis.

With Special Area Management Plans (SAMPS), the Corps of Engineers undertakes a comprehensive review of aquatic resources in an entire watershed. This approach is more environmentally sensitive than the traditional project-by-project process. The traditional approach does not facilitate the evaluation of cumulative loss of resources over time. With the SAMP approach, we can analyze potential impacts at the watershed scale in order to identify priority areas for preservation, identify potential restoration areas, determine the least environmentally damaging locations for proposed projects, and establish alternative permitting processes appropriate for the SAMP areas.

The goals of SAMPS are to achieve a balance between aquatic resource protection and reasonable economic development and infrastructure. SAMPS are designed to be conducted in geographic areas of special sensitivity under intense development pressure. These comprehensive and complex efforts require the participation of multiple local, state, and federal agencies. In addition, the Corps of Engineers considers public and stakeholder involvement an essential part of a successful SAMP.

In Southern California, SAMPS are currently being conducted in the San Diego Creek watershed San Juan Creek and portions of San Mateo Creek watersheds in Orange County; western Riverside County including portions of San Jacinto and upper Santa Margarita watersheds; and Otay River watershed in San Diego County. SAMPS are not funded through normal Regulatory operations, but are usually provided funding by a combination of Congressional and local government appropriations, as well as local stakeholders.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the purpose of a SAMP?

The Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles District conducts comprehensive aquatic resource plans to achieve a balance between aquatic resource protection and reasonable economic development. SAMPS are designed to be conducted in geographic areas of special sensitivity under intense development pressure. Interagency, public, and stakeholder involvement is an essential part of a SAMP.

Where is the Corps developing these SAMPS?

SAMPS are currently being conducted in the San Diego Creek watershed; San Juan Creek and portions of San Mateo Creek watersheds in Orange County; western Riverside County including portions of San Jacinto and upper Santa Margarita watersheds; and Otay River watershed in San Diego County.

What will be the end result of the process?

There are two main goals of the SAMP process: to establish an alternate permitting process in consideration of the aquatic resources within a particular SAMP area and a coordinated aquatic resource management and restoration strategy. With completion of a SAMP, there will be areas where future activities would be allowed to occur, provided they meet specific criteria developed for protection of the watersheds, as well as areas that will be protected and preserved through conservation easements, local land use zoning, and/or restrictions on Section 404 permits. To this end, an anticipated end result is an alternate program-level permitting process.

What are the effects of the SAMPS on growth/environmental protection in the study areas?

The SAMP process is expected to provide better scientific information to improve the decision making process, allow for

a comprehensive approach for the management of aquatic resources, provide predictability to the local citizens, and reflect the needs of the communities situated within these watersheds.

What are the benefits of SAMPs?

Under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA), the Corps of Engineers regulates discharge of dredge or fill material into waters of the United States. SAMPs are more environmentally sensitive than the conventional project-by-project process; the conventional approach is less sensitive to evaluating the cumulative loss of resources over time. The SAMP approach allows the Corps to take into account indirect and cumulative effects on aquatic resources in a way not possible in the project-by-project process. With the SAMP approach, we can analyze potential impacts at the watershed scale in order to identify priority areas for preservation, identify potential restoration areas, and determine the least environmentally damaging locations for proposed projects.

What is the first step in developing a SAMP?

Phase I of a SAMP includes the completion of technical studies to identify the aquatic resources in the project area and to characterize their condition. Other technical studies that aid in understanding aquatic resources in the watersheds may also be conducted.

What happens after the technical studies are completed?

The next phase of a SAMP would consist of compliance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). As part of our compliance with NEPA an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be prepared for each SAMP. Phase II of the process will include the development and analysis of project alternatives and preparation of the Draft EIS.

Phase III entails the establishment of an aquatic resource conservation program, as well as an alternate permitting process under Section 404 of the CWA. Future projects may be authorized under the alternative permitting process if they meet specific criteria designed to avoid and minimize impacts to aquatic resources.

Who is responsible for the SAMP?

The Corps of Engineers is the lead federal agency for the SAMP.

Are other agencies involved?

Other participating agencies include the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Regional Water Quality Control Board, and the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG). The CDFG is concurrently undertaking a Master Streambed Alteration Agreement to fulfill the requirements of Sections 1600 of the state Fish and Game Code for several SAMPs.